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# homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, November 17, 1943

Reserve

Subject: "SPICES" Information from Food Distribution officials of the U. S.  
Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

In King Solomon's day -- close to three thousand years ago -- spices rated with gold and silver in tributes paid the King. And nowadays we feel spices are almost as valuable in wartime cookery. We can't always find as great a variety of foods as we might like...but we can use spices to add variety in flavor, aroma, and color to our meals. Even when the usual kinds are hard to get, we cook with kinds of spice that are new to us...like the early explorers, we get a spirit of adventure in our spice cookery.

Getting back to history -- the romantic story of spices doesn't stop with Solomon. Explorations, wars, conquests, international trade of just about every country in the world -- these are all related to the search for spices. Spices even played an important part in the discovery of America...Columbus was looking for the Spice Islands -- the East Indies -- when he found the Bahamas.

We use two different groups of spices. -- the pungent ones, that "bite" your tongue...the peppers, mustard, and ginger. And the other, the aromatic kind, includes cinnamon, allspice, and nutmeg. And spices come from many different kinds of plants. Black pepper is the fruit of a tall vine produced in the Dutch East Indies -- white pepper is the same fruit with the outer hull removed when the fruit is fully ripened. Cloves are the flower bud of a large tree, while cinnamon is the bark of a tree. Nutmeg and mace are twin spices -- part of the same fruit. Nutmeg is the kernel of a peach-like fruit in a thin hard shell, and mace is the outer membrane clinging to the shell. Ginger is the root of a plant produced in Africa, India, and Jamaica. Then there are some spices that are seeds --

St. Louis, Mo.,

Feb. 10, 1914.

My dear Mr. [Name illegible]

Dear Sir,

I have just received your letter of the 7th inst. regarding the matter of the [illegible] and am glad to hear that you are interested in the same. I am sorry that I cannot give you a more definite answer at this time, but the [illegible] is still in the hands of the [illegible] and it is necessary for me to wait until they have made their decision. I will be sure to let you know as soon as I hear from them.

Very respectfully,

[Illegible signature and address block]

such as celery, mustard, caraway, and poppy. And there are leaves like marjoram, thyme, bay, and sage.

Spices grow all over the world -- from India to South America, from Madagascar to China. And before the war nearly every country contributed to our spice supply. Now, much of this supply is cut off. Islands in the Pacific and Far East that used to send us spices are now occupied by the Japanese. And shortages of shipping make it harder for us to get spices from other parts of the world. Like Columbus, we have to find new trade routes for spices. We can still get ginger, celery, coriander, dill, and fennel seeds from India. Nutmeg, mace, allspice, and ginger come now from the British West Indies, cinnamon from Ceylon, and some spices from South America. We've always produced most of our own red pepper and part of the mustard, and we're trying to increase production of other spices in this country. For example, we used to import most of our sage from Yugoslavia...but this year's Thanksgiving turkey is more than likely to be seasoned with home-grown sage. And we're also raising small quantities of seeds like celery, coriander, poppy, and caraway.

But we're not yet growing enough of our own spices to meet all our needs. That's why the War Food Administration is regulating the available supplies of the eight principal spices -- cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, mace, black pepper, white pepper, ginger, allspice. These spices are being distributed through regular channels of trade much the way they were before the war -- and that means a fair share for civilians, armed forces, allies, and reserves.

Because you use just a dash of pepper on your potato, or a spoonful of cinnamon or ginger in a batch of cookies, you may think spices aren't very important. But we import about 125 million pounds of spices each year, and produce another 30 million pounds in this country.

Black pepper is the spice we use most often...we buy about as much of it as





we do of all the other imported spices combined. Next in popularity is cinnamon or cassia -- similar in taste though not in origin -- a favorite in cinnamon buns, applesauce, cookies. And we use a good deal of spice in commercial preparations -- foods like pickles, preserves, mincemeat, and prepared mustard, that add interest to our meals. Meat packers use spices in practically every type of sausage and meat loaf -- and the baker uses 'em in his cakes and pastries.

And the Armed Forces need large quantities of spices, too. Tasty, appetizing food is good for morale, on battlefield or home front. Mustard, ginger, and pepper are on the front lines along with meats, fish, and other foods. And our Allies also like their food well-seasoned, and part of the spice supply is budgeted for them. For example, the pork product we send to Russia, known as "tushonka", is well-flavored with bayleaves.

Now you probably want to know whether we'll be able to get all the spices we want this winter. The answer partly depends on us homemakers. If we don't hoard, but buy only the amount and kinds of spices we need, there'll be enough. And as you may have found, spices don't keep satisfactorily over a long period of time...they lose their unique flavor. So let's keep them tightly covered, and buy small amounts at a time. Occasionally we may not be able to find exactly the kind we want at our grocer's...during wartime it's just as hard for the grocer to keep his shelves stocked with spices as with any other food. So if you can't get the kind of spice you want, try one of the spices you're less familiar with. Allspice gives the flavor of a combination of spices and may be used to save cinnamon and nutmeg. Try using powdered mustard in cheese or tomato dishes or in a white sauce. And it's always fun to do some careful experimenting with other spices and herbs...celery seed in cole slaw or casseroles, caraway or poppy seed in rolls or Christmas cookies.

And so there should be spices to meet our needs during the war. Let's use them with care and skill in our wartime cooking, to make our meals more tasty and interesting.

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